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ABSTRACT

Students from introductory speech classes at the University of Illinois and Parkland Community College were asked to list their attitudes about four groups: businessmen, farmers, politicians, and war protesters. The strengths of those beliefs were evaluated via seven internal semantic differential scales. The sum of the scales served as a first measure of the attitudes the subjects held toward the four groups. In later tests, the subjects randomly assigned to the control group were given the original attitude questionnaire again, while the experimental group was tested in other ways for acceptance of various beliefs about the four role and occupational types. Finally, the subjects in the experimental test group were examined for their attitudes toward the role and occupational types to check for changes in attitudes from the first examinations. The resulting data indicated that attitudes can be made salient without being made stronger. (EE)

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AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE ATTITUDE CHANGE THAT RESULTS FROM MAKING SPECIFIC BELIEFS SALIENT

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It was posited that if one's attitude toward an object is a function of his beliefs about the object and his evaluation of those beliefs and if it is the salient beliefs that determine attitude, then a change in attitude will result from a change in one's salient beliefs. Consistent with the above, the direction of change in attitude would depend on whether the salient beliefs are accepted or rejected and on how they are evaluated. It was predicted that the acceptance of beliefs would lead to attitude change in the direction of the evaluation of the beliefs while rejection of beliefs would lead to counterattitudinal change. An experimental test of this prediction was confirmed. The results are discussed in terms of their implications for rhetorical theory and a strategy for persuasion.

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AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE ATTITUDE CHANGE THAT RESULTS FROM MAKING SPECIFIC BELIEFS SALIENT

Recent research by Fishbein and his associates[1] has suggested that an individual's attitude toward an object is a function of his beliefs about that object and his evaluation of those beliefs. This relationship is of obvious importance to the rhetorician since it implies that "attitude change will occur when: (1) an individual's beliefs about an object change and/or (2) when the evluative aspects of beliefs about an object change."[2] The rhetorician, of course, wants to know how to obtain changes in either of these components. Fishbein suggests that there are two ways in which beliefs about an object may change: "(1) new beliefs may be learned, that is, new concepts may be related to the attitude object, new stimulus-response associations may be learned, and (2) the strength of already held beliefs may change, that is the position of beliefs in the habit-family hierarchy [of responses] may be altered through positive or negative reinforcement."[3] Thus if our goal was to move an individual's attitude toward "Volkswagen" in the positive direction we might seek to associate new beliefs with the object (the new heating system is very effective), to strengthen already existing beliefs (it really saves gas--32 miles to the gallon) and/or to change the evaluative aspect of already held beliefs (a small car is desirable since it is easy to handle).

Fishbein views an individual's beliefs as forming a habit-family hierarchy of responses. Within this hierarchy the most salient beliefs, those that an individual would use to describe the object, are the ones that serve to determine his attitude toward the object. He notes that "although an individual may have many beliefs about any given attitude object, there are probably only six to eleven beliefs that actually appear in his hierarchy...and function

as determinants of attitude."[4] Viewed in this manner, as a Hullian habit-family hierarchy of responses, Fishbein argues that "the higher the response in the hierarchy, the greater is the probability that the response is associated with the stimulus, that is, the stronger is the belief."[5] Thus he sees the saliency of a belief correlating positively with the strength of the belief. A change in strength leads to a change in saliency. The purpose of the research reported in this paper was to determine if the saliency of a belief could be manipulated without an attempt at a manipulation of the strength of the belief and to discover if such a manipulation would lead to a correspondent change in attitude.

Fishbein's theory implies that an individual's attitude toward an object can change only when he learns something new about the object; when he forms a new stimulus-response association. Thus the hierarchy of an individual tends to remain constant and whenever the attitude object is considered the same beliefs in the same hierarchical order are used in evaluating the object. The definition of the term salient that is used in this paper is provided by Newcomb, Turner and Converse who use the term to describe "stored information that has been prompted to the forefront of the individual's conscious thought by the characteristics of the immediate situation in which he finds himself."[6] In this light, as the situation changes from time to time, different beliefs will be salient for an individual. As these salient beliefs determine attitude it is seen that attitude will change from time 1 to time 2 and from situation 1 to situation 2. That is, the information, or rather the belief, that is prompted to the forefront of an individual's conscious thought depends on the immediate situation in which he finds himself. Thus, if an individual

attends to or considers a belief statement (Volkswagens are small) the belief is momentarily salient, but the strength of the belief does not necessarily change.

One implication of this notion of the saliency of beliefs is that when the belief statement is presented to an individual for his consideration, he must be in a position to either accept the statement as true or to reject it as false. Otherwise, the presentation of a belief statement would serve as positive reinforcement for the belief and would serve to strengthen the belief. Bishop suggests that when subjects are rating the strength of a belief about an object and score the lower half of a bi-polar scale they may be indicating disbelief rather than a weak level of belief.[7] Thus the rejection of a positively evaluated belief would lead to the acceptance of its opposite, a negatively evaluated belief.

If the preceding argument is correct, the presentation of a proposition or belief statement for an individual to consider would serve to make the belief salient for him. If the salient beliefs determine attitude, the mere making of the belief salient would lead to a change in attitude toward the object. The direction of attitude change would then depend on two factors: (1) the acceptance or rejection of the belief, and (2) the evaluation of the belief. This leads to the generation of the four specific research hypotheses that were tested by the present study, namely:

1. When beliefs about an object which are positively evaluated are made salient and are accepted, attitude toward that object will shift in the positive direction.
2. When beliefs about an object which are positively evaluated are made

salient but are rejected, attitude toward that object will shift in the negative direction.

3. When beliefs about an object which are negatively evaluated are made salient and are accepted, attitude toward that object will shift in the negative direction.

Procedure

Students from introductory speech classes at the University of Illinois and Parkland Community College served as subjects. In an initial session subjects were asked to list their beliefs about four attitude objects: businessmen, farmers, politicians, and war protesters. They then indicated the strength of these beliefs and the evaluative aspect of these beliefs.[8] Following this, the subjects indicated their attitude toward each of the objects via seven interval semantic differential scales that loaded highly on the evaluative dimension.[9] The sum of the five scales for each item served as the pretest measure of attitude toward the object. The elicitation and evluation of the beliefs, while not central to the present investigation served to mask the nature of the pretest.

Two weeks after the pretest, the subjects who were randomly assigned to the experimental condition were presented with three statements of belief about one of the above mentioned groups: either farmers or politicians. The beliefs, which are listed in Table (1), were presented in the form "Farmers are Lazy."

Using three of the B scales validated by Fishbein and Raven as an accurate measure of the acceptance of a belief, probable-improbable, likely-unlikely, true-false, the subjects indicated their acceptance or rejection of

the belief statements. Three of Fishbein and Raven's A scales, good-bad. harmful-beneficial and wise-foolish, were used as a measure of attitude toward the beliefs.[10] These subjects were then retested for their attitude toward this particular group of people. While the subjects in the experimental condition completed the above outlined task, the subjects in the control group were readministered the original attitude questionnaire. This provided a post-test score on all four of the attitude objects.

Assignment to experimental condition

The subjects in the experimental group were assigned to one of the topic conditions by random selection. They were assigned to one of the four manipulative conditions on the basis of their own reaction to the belief statements with which they were presented. The acceptance or rejection of the belief statements was determined by summing across the B scales. The evaluation of the statements was determined by summing across the A scales. So, even though a pretest had been used to obtain the lists of beliefs that tended to be evaluated alike (Table 1) subjects actually place themselves into the cells depending on their own acceptance or rejection and evaluation of the statements. Thus if a subject was presented with belief statements which he rejected and evaluated negatively, he was placed in the negative-reject cell of the matrix.

Results

The data was analyzed in a 2 x 5 analysis of variance. The two factors were the two topics, farmers and politicians, and the five treatment conditions, positive-accept, positive-reject, negative-accept, negative-reject, and control. The analysis of variance which is summarized in Table (2) revealed a significant main effect for only one of the independent variables, the treat-

ment conditions ($F = 15.07$, $df = 4/118$, $p < .001$). The mean attitude change scores reported in Table (3) shows that in the experimental conditions the attitude change was in the predicted direction. T-tests performed between the control group and each of the experimental conditions were all significant beyond the .05 level. This provides reasonable support for all of the research hypotheses.

Discussion

This investigation indicates that beliefs can be made salient without being made stronger. Indeed, in the present study, the subjects were free to reject the beliefs. This suggests that, even though the order of elicitation of beliefs are often highly correlated with the strength of the beliefs the two can be manipulated independently. This provides the rhetor with three strategies by which he may seek to alter the beliefs held by his auditors. He may seek (1) to add new beliefs about an object, (2) to strengthen beliefs already held, and (3) to alter the saliency of already held beliefs. He may, of course, as a fourth method of changing attitude, seek to alter the evaluative aspect of the beliefs.

The question for the rhetorician is, how can beliefs be made salient? In the present study subjects were asked to consider a proposition; they were thus made to attend to the belief. In discourse one might choose to make a belief salient through a rhetorical question. For example, let me ask you if you believe that an earthquake will occur in San Francisco in the near future? If I may presume to suggest that most people evaluate earthquakes negatively and tend to believe that this area will indeed suffer another quake,

your attitude toward this city has just moved a slight bit negative.

While your attitude toward San Francisco is now determined, in part, by your belief in a future earthquake, the notion of saliency as used in this paper is transitory. In three or four weeks when you are marking final exams, the belief that San Francisco will soon have an earthquake may no longer be salient. Indeed, this evening when you are riding on a trolly to Fisherman's Wharf the prospect of a quake may be the furthest thing from your mind. Other beliefs would then be salient and would serve as determinants of your attitude.

The problem for the rhetor is then, how to keep a belief salient? Advertisers have long sought a cute jingle or catchy phrase so that the product name would linger in the minds of the hearers. Perhaps a striking example or interesting analogy would serve to keep a belief salient for a long period of time. George Lincoln Rockwell used common household items as the evidence for some of his arguments. He would discuss what to him was a Jewish conspiracy that caused food prices to increase. He argued that the Rabbis who certify that food has been prepared in accordance with religious laws and who therefore allow the food to bear a letter "K" for kosher are paid millions of dollars a year. For proof his hearers were told to look at the "K's" on the food products they use. When the audience next looked at a bottle of ketchup that contained the "K" the argument would again be salient. McCoy has called this the Technique of Visual Vigilence.[11] The hearer is constantly reminded of the arguments by the things he sees everyday.

When one notes the fact that the rejection of beliefs leads to attitude change that is opposite to the direction intended he is struck with an inter-

esting implication for a theory of persuasion. That is, if the rhetor does not have reason to expect that his message will be accepted as true and evaluated as he desires he probably should not speak. For to do so will lead not to no attitude change but to counter attitudinal change. This may provide an explanation for the boomerang effect obtained in several of the Yale studies.[12] If in those experiments most subjects accepted and evaluated the messages as was planned, they would have changed their attitude in the predicted direction. But those subjects that either did not accept the message or evaluated it differently than the experimentors had expected would change their attitude in the opposite direction.

This last point also provides a theoretical framework from which to understand the effects of irony. The speaker makes a belief salient, but plans for it to be rejected by his audience. Thus Anthony made salient for the citizens of Rome, the belief that "Brutus is an honorable man." One suspects that he planned for his audience to reject this positively evaluated belief and to accept its opposite; the negatively evaluated belief that "Brutus is a dishonorable man."

While there are several other implications generated by this study for the field of persuasion, the last one I shall mention is that these results suggest that a new genre of communication is in need of study. We have long looked to the speeches of advocacy in order to determine their effects, now we have discovered a strategy of communication that is non-advocative, but that also has effects. This area needs additional investigation and if warranted, incorporation into theories of persuasion.

Table 1

BELIEFS PRESENTED IN THE EXPERIMENTAL CONDITIONS

Condition	Topic	
	Farmers	Politicians
Positive Accept	conservationists honest industrious	articulate friendly intelligent
Positive Reject	articulate broad minded unprejudiced	incorruptible unprejudiced unselfish
Negative Accept	bigoted inarticulate narrow minded	clannish corrupt two-faced
Negative Reject	hateful lazy traitors	not friendly traitors unintelligent

Table 2

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P
A Topic	10.42	1	10.42	0.88	ns
B Stimuli	715.52	4	178.75	15.07	<.001
A & B	44.97	4	11.24	0.95	ns
Within cell	1400.38	118	11.86		

Table 3

MEAN DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST ATTITUDE TOWARD THE OBJECT AND DIRECTION OF ATTITUDE CHANGE PREDICTED

		Reaction To Beliefs Presented				
		Positive Accept	Positive Reject	Negative Accept	Negative Reject	Control Group
Topic	Farmers	2.75	-2.50	-4.28	2.43	-.86
	Politicians	2.75	-2.27	-2.00	2.35	-.39
Prediction of Attitude Change		+	-	-	+	0

Footnotes

1. The best summary of the research is contained in Readings in Attitude Theory and Measurement, ed. Martin Fishbein (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1967). Specifically, the chapters entitled, "A Consideration of Beliefs, and Their Role in Attitude Measurement," pp. 257-266; and "A Behavior Theory Approach to the Relations between Beliefs About an Object and the Attitude Toward the Object," pp. 389-400, both written by the editor, provide a fine overview of the theoretical position and the empirical support for the position.
2. Fishbein, "A Behavior Theory Approach..." p. 397.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 395.
5. Ibid., p. 390.
6. Social Psychology, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1965) p. 37.
7. Personal correspondence reported in J. Richard Hackman and Lynn R. Anderson, "The Strength, Relevance, and Source of Beliefs About an Object in Fishbein's Attitude Theory," The Journal of Social Psychology, LXXVI (1968) 64. Research in personality theory, while not conclusive, tends to support this position. See J. C. J. Bonarius, "Research on the Personal Construct Theory of George A. Kelly: Role Construct Repertory Test and Basic Theory." Progress in Experimental Personality Research, Vol. II, ed. Brendon A. Muher (New York: Academic Press, 1965), 1-46.
8. While this task was not central to the investigation at this time it is similar to the procedure used in a pilot study, the purpose of which was to obtain lists of beliefs about the attitude objects that were non-salient for the population. Beliefs that were mentioned infrequently or not at all were then presented to another group of subjects for them to indicate acceptance or rejection of the

beliefs and their positive or negative evaluation of the beliefs. This created the four stimuli sets of beliefs for each topic.

9. The scales were: good-bad, kind-cruel, beneficial-harmful, ugly-beautiful, wise-foolish.

10. "The AB Scales: An Operational Definition of Belief and Attitude," Human Relations, XV (1962), 35-44/

11. Michael McCoy, "George Lincoln Rockwell and the Technique of Visual Vigilence, Unpublished paper presented in a seminar in Theories of Oral Communication, University of Illinois, Spring, 1969.

12. Carl I. Hovland, Irving L. Janis, and Harold H. Kelley, Communication and Persuasion: Psychological Studies of Opinion Change, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), pp. 141-143.